XIV
TEN BASES OF MERITORIOUS ACTION

PART THREE: THE *BHAVANA* GROUP

CONTENTS

1. The Miracle of the Power of the Doctrine (*Dhamma*)

Once, while the Buddha was residing at Nalanda in Pavarika's mango grove, the lay disciple **Kevaddha** approached the Buddha and implored him to appoint one of the monks to perform miracles so that the city of Nalanda would become much more confident in the Buddha and more people would become his disciples. However, the Buddha rejected his request saying that he did not teach the *Dhamma* to the monks this way “Go, monks, and perform superhuman feats and miracles for the white-clothed laity.”

The Buddha gave the same answer when asked the second time. At the third request, the Buddha told him about the three kinds of miracles which he had known and realized by his own insight. The first was the miracle of **psychic power** (*iddhi patihariya*) consisting in the ability to become many and pass through walls, to fly through the air and walk on water, and even to visit the Brahma world. It was rejected by the Buddha because it could be mistaken as the black art called **Gandhari magic**. The second, the miracle of **mind reading** (*adesana patihariya*) was also rejected because it might be mistaken as practice of *cintamani* or ‘jewel of thought’ charm called **Manika magic**. He recommended the performance of the third miracle, the miracle of the **power of the Teaching** (*anusasani patihariya*) as it involves the practice in Morality, Concentration and Wisdom leading finally to the extinction of defilements (*Asavakkhaya Nana*) and the realization of *Nibbana*, the cessation of all suffering. This is the **greatest miracle** that can only exist during a Buddha *sasana.*

2. Teaching the Doctrine (*Dhamma-desana*)

The *Atthasalini* defines teaching the Doctrine as follows:
“*From a desire for gain, thinking, 'Thus they will know me to be a preacher', someone preaches a sermon. That sermon is not of much fruit. One who makes the attainment of emancipation the chief motive, not a desire for honour, and so preaches the Doctrine in*

which he is proficient -- this is the basis of meritorious action consisting of teaching."

a) The Pure and Proper Manner of Teaching

In *Samyutta* ii, 199, the Buddha differentiated two types of *Dhamma* teachers, namely:

- The **impure and improper manner** of teaching by a monk with such a type of mind: "People will be satisfied with my teaching and they will obey me and support me."
- The **pure and proper manner** of teaching by a monk with such type of mind: "After the people have listened to my teaching, they will understand and appreciate the *Dhamma* and begin to practise morality, concentration and wisdom according to the Noble Eightfold Path so that they may be free from suffering." Thus he teaches the doctrine to others because it leads to liberation and because of his compassion for them.

b) Story of the Golden Fish with a Stinking Breath

Teaching for fame and gain can lead to great suffering as shown in the case of a monk named Kapila mentioned in *Dhammapada* 334-337. During the Dispensation of Buddha Kassapa, two brothers entered the monkhood. The older brother undertook meditation and very soon attained *Arahantship*. The younger brother named Kapila, took up study of the *Tipitaka* and became very proficient in scriptural knowledge, gaining a large following and through his following, great offerings. Thereupon he became so conceited with his knowledge that he would pronounce a thing said by others, even when it was right, to be wrong and vice versa.

The kindly monks would admonish him quoting from the Doctrine and Discipline, but Kapila was so intoxicated by the pride of knowledge that he would snub and disparage them. Even his older brother could not change his attitude. Thus did the monk Kapila

adopt an evil mode of conduct and retard the Teaching of the Buddha Kassapa. When he died, he was reborn in *Avici* Hell where he underwent great suffering. Because his evil *kamma* had not been exhausted, he was reborn this time as a fish in the Aciravati river in Savatthi where it was caught and brought before the Buddha. As soon as the fish opened its mouth, it emitted a foul odour and the whole place stank. Thereupon the Buddha related the past life of the fish when he was the monk Kapila. Because he preached the *Dhamma* and recited praises of the Buddha, he received a golden hue on his body, but because he reviled and abused the good monks, he inherited a stinking mouth. After that, the fish died and was reborn in *Avici* Hell.

3. Teaching of the *Dhamma* by Lay Disciples and Benefits

Although lay people are generally less proficient than monks, they can still teach the *Dhamma* to their fellow Buddhists in the manner recommended by the Buddha in *Anguttara* iv, 219. He can do that by teaching his fellow Buddhists to achieve the level that **he himself has achieved.**

- Thus when he has achieved **faith** himself, he strives to encompass faith in another.
- When he has achieved **morality** himself, he strives to encompass morality in another.
- When he has achieved **renunciation** himself, he strives to encompass renunciation in another.
- When he longs himself to **see the monks;** longs himself to **hear** the Good *Dhamma;* is **mindful** himself of the *Dhamma* he has heard**;** **reflects** himself upon its meaning**;** **knows** himself both the letter and spirit of the *Dhamma*; and **walks in conformity** therewith**;** and strives to teach another what he has achieved, then the lay disciple helps his own welfare as well as the welfare of another.

Benefits of Teaching the *Dhamma*

- From this proper manner of teaching, a lay disciple who wishes to teach out of compassion for others will surely practise the *Dhamma* himself in order to experience its benefits before he is proficient to teach. Thus he progresses in the *Dhamma.* The fruit of a proper and pure manner of teaching is **success** in the attainment of Path and Fruition Knowledge because the *Dhamma* is the **cause of success**.

- Of all gifts, the gift of *Dhamma* is the best. Therefore those who have made progress in the *Dhamma* and devote their time to teaching the *Dhamma* to adults or school children truly deserve our praise for propagating the Buddha's Teachings in a modern society that is plagued by materialism and wrong views. Such teachers are loved and respected by the Buddhist community.

4. Listening to the Doctrine (*Dhamma-savana*)

The *Atthasalini* defines listening to the *Dhamma* as such:

"One who listens to the doctrine, thinking, 'They will take me, thus listening, for one of the faithful'-- this does not yield much fruit. Another, out of softness of heart, suffusing good, listens, thinking, 'There will be much fruit for me!' This is the basis of meritorious action consisting of listening to the Doctrine".

In *Anguttara* i, 129, the Buddha described 3 types of listeners, namely:

- The **topsy-turvy brained** listener is one who pays no attention throughout the whole talk. He is compared to a pot that is overturned in which any water poured thereon runs off.

- The **scatter-brained** listener is one who pays attention throughout the whole talk but cannot be bothered to remember

anything afterwards. It is like piling food and other things on this person's lap. When he rises from his seat, he scatters them all over the place through **absent-mindedness.**

- The man of **comprehensive mind** is one who pays full attention throughout the talk and when he rises from his seat, he still **remembers** all that he has heard. He is compared to an upright pot, which accumulates all the water that is poured into it.

Story of a *deva* who was distracted during the First Sermon

Paying full attention while listening to the *Dhamma* is paramount if one wishes to benefit from the talk. This is illustrated in the Discourse on *Hemavata Sutta* by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, concerning a *deva* named **Satagiri**. When the Buddha preached the First Sermon at Deer Park in Isipatana two months after His Enlightenment, Satagiri was among the millions of celestial beings present, but instead of listening attentively to the Buddha, he diverted his attention to looking for his absent friend **Hemavata** from among the audience. At the end of the Sermon, the Venerable Kondanna and 18 crores of *devas* and *Brahmas* attained the stage of *Sotapanna* but Satagiri failed to achieve similar realization owing to his distraction.

Later on, he met his friend Hemavata above the city of **Rajagaha** and both had a discussion about the Buddha. A merchant's daughter named **Kali overheard** their conversation and **listened attentively** as Satagiri spoke in praise of the Buddha's virtues. In the process, she **attained** the stage of *Sotapanna*. Among female lay disciples, the Buddha named her **chief** among those who achieved **firm faith**, **even by listening to another** (i.e. from hearsay). Regarding the two *devas*, both then proceeded with their followers to worship the Buddha who was now in the Uruvela forest. There, Hemavata posed several questions to the Buddha. Upon hearing the Buddha's answers, Hemavata and Satagiri together with their 1000 followers all became *Sotapannas.*

5. Proper Way of Listening to a Sermon and the Benefits

The way to conduct oneself while listening to a sermon is described in Kindred Sayings on Kassapa, *Samyutta* ii, 220, as follows:

- A sermon must be attended to so that one may **profit** from it. Such an attitude will **foster full attention** to what is being preached so that one will not miss a word of what is spoken in order to understand the meaning of each and every word uttered. This means that the listener must listen carefully with **full mental involvement**, and the words of the *Dhamma* must be **adhered to** in practice.

- By attending to a sermon this way, one's mind will be **calm and absorbed** in the sermon; one will be free from interference and thus attain **purity of mind**. The Scriptures provide many cases of realization of the *Dhamma* this way by people who listened attentively to a sermon by the Buddha or an *Arahant.*

- According to the commentaries, people who can attain the first and higher stages of enlightenment through mere hearing of a discourse do not exist anymore nowadays. However, one can gain knowledge by **listening attentively to the wise** when one is unable to think out or reason by oneself. This kind of knowledge is called ***Sutamaya Panna*** (wisdom derived through hearing) while the knowledge acquired through reasoning is called ***Cintamaya Panna*** (wisdom derived from thinking) and the experiential or insight knowledge gained through meditation is called ***Bhavanamaya Panna*** (wisdom derived from meditation). According to the *Mangala Sutta*, "Association with the wise is the highest blessing", because when one listens attentively to the words of the wise, one acquires wisdom from them.

- In worldly matters, *Cintamaya Panna* and *Sutamaya Panna* are very extensive in nature. All the arts and sciences one learned at school and university, were acquired through listening, and thus constitute *Sutamaya Panna*. All various crafts and professions acquired through one's reasoning and research and not through

asking or hearing from others constitute *Cintamaya Panna*. Thus to achieve worldly knowledge to enable one to be successful, **attentive listening** followed by **reasoning or research** on the subject is crucial.

6. Straightening One's Views (*Ditthijukamma*)

Straightening one's views or beliefs is the moral volition of correcting one's wrong views and establishing right understanding (*samma-ditthi*) of the Ten Subjects, the Law of *Kamma*, *Vipassana* or Insight Knowledge and the supra-mundane knowledge of the Four Noble Truths (refer to Right View in Chapter III, Noble Eightfold Path).

7. Types of Wrong Views (*Miccha-ditthi*)

In the *Brahmajala Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya,* the Buddha enumerated **62 kinds of wrong views**, all of which can be categorized as follows: eternity-belief, evasiveness or eel-wriggling, belief that things arise without any cause, annihilation-belief, and the belief that the highest bliss is sensual pleasure or *jhanic* bliss. Among these wrong views, the Buddha highlighted **3 kinds of wrong views**, which when taken up or embraced by people, will lead them to extremes and become ***akiriya-ditthi*** holders (**View of the Inefficacy of Action**). They are:

i) ***Pubbekata-hetu ditthi***

The view that all sensations experienced by beings in the present existence are caused and conditioned only by the volitional actions done by them in their past existences, i.e. **belief in past *kamma* only**.

ii) ***Issaranimma-hetu ditthi***
The view that all sensations experienced by beings in the present existence are caused by a **supreme-being** or **creator god**.

iii) ***Ahetu-apaccaya ditthi***
The view that all sensations experienced by beings in the present existence come into existence on their own, **without any cause or condition**.

In *Anguttara* i, 173, the Buddha refuted all these wrong views thus:

- There will be persons who, conditioned by their past volitional activities, will kill living beings, steal, commit sexual misconduct, tell lies, slander, use harsh speech, talk foolishly, are greedy, hateful, and hold wrong views. This is because they do not believe in the efficacy of present actions or present ***kamma***. So there is **no desire (*chanda*) or effort (*viriya*)** to differentiate what actions should be done and what actions should be avoided. In such persons there cannot arise righteous beliefs that are conducive to the cessation of defilements.

- By the same token, those who believe in a **creator-god** or those who believe that **things arise without causes or conditions** will kill living beings, steal, commit sexual misconduct, etc. This is because they do not believe in the efficacy of present actions (present *kamma*). So there **is no desire or effort** to differentiate what actions should be done and what actions should be avoided. In such persons there cannot arise righteous beliefs that are conducive to the cessation of defilements.

- In this world, there are such things as **'hearing the discourse delivered by the wise'** and **'wise consideration,'** which are the conditions to become wise and virtuous. If those three views which reject all present causes are correct, then those things called 'hearing the discourse' and 'wise consideration' will become fruitless and useless, because the holders of those views

believe that 'to become a wise man or a fool' is solely caused by their past *kamma*, or by the creator-god or by no cause at all i.e. at random. However, we all know this to be false.

8. Advantages of Straightening One's Views.

By straightening one's views, one acquires Right View, which leads to happy existences and *Nibbana* while wrong view leads to woeful states and suffering. Like all conditioned things, Right View arises through certain causes and conditions, such as:

a) **Attentive listening** to any teaching, instruction and talk about truth in conformity with the truth, namely the Four Noble Truths.

b) **Wise attention** by reflection or consideration that accords with the truth, namely by considering:
i) The **impermanent** as impermanent, not as permanent
ii) **Suffering** as suffering, not as pleasurable
iii) **Non-self** as non-self, not as self
iv) **Loathsome** as loathsome, not as beautiful

c) **Three kinds of Right View** should be understood, namely:
i) Right understanding of the Ten Subjects (refer to Right View in Chapter III, the Noble Eightfold Path)
ii) Right understanding of the Law of *Kamma,* namely: that all beings are owners of their *kamma* or actions done by them in the **past and present**, and will reap the corresponding results.
iii) Right understanding of the true nature of physical & mental processes, their cause/effect relationship, *Vipassana* or insight knowledge and supra-mundane knowledge of the Four Noble Truths.

The first two types of understanding can be acquired through listening, but the last types can only be acquired by *Satipatthana Vipassana* meditation. Buddhist Meditation, which is part of the *Bhavana* Group, is treated in the next chapter.

9. References

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